
News Release Island Fox Recovery Update

Yvonne Menard
Channel Islands National Park
(805) 658-5725

Julie Benson
The Nature Conservancy
(213)327-0379

Lois Grunwald
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
(805) 644-1766

Endangered Island Fox Pups Born

A joint captive breeding program to restore the four subspecies of endangered island fox has produced 33 pups this spring and is expected to produce more—further boosting the unique species' population on the northern Channel Islands, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the National Park Service (NPS) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) announced today.

Twelve fox pups—including 8 females—were born on San Miguel Island, while 9 were born on neighboring Santa Rosa Island. The breeding season on Santa Cruz Island is still active, but so far, 12 pups have been born. The births raise the total captive population of island foxes to 50 on San Miguel, 55 on Santa Rosa, and 37 on Santa Cruz. Between 75 and 100 island foxes live in the wild on Santa Cruz Island; Santa Rosa Island has 7 in the wild.

“The Channel Islands are among the richest areas of unique plant and animal life in North America,” said Lotus Vermeer, director of TNC Santa Cruz Island Preserve. “The successful 2004 breeding season for island foxes moves us closer to preserving the diversity of life on the islands.”

“Our highest priority at Channel Islands National Park is to save the island fox,” said Park Superintendent Russell Galipeau. “The island fox adapted to life on the Channel Islands over a period of more than 16,000 years. We are reversing the precipitous population declines that resulted from the establishment of golden eagles on the islands in the 1990s.”

Galipeau said biologists recently captured a golden eagle adult and chick on Santa Cruz Island. The adult bird has been relocated to the eastern Sierra Nevada and the chick will be fostered to a mainland nest. Biologists believe this adult bird was responsible for the killing of two Santa Cruz Island foxes. Since 1999, 34 golden eagles have been removed from the northern Channel Islands. Approximately a dozen remain.

The NPS, USFWS and TNC are engaged in an ambitious program to save the island foxes by breeding them in captivity, relocating golden eagles to the mainland and eliminating nonnative feral pigs from Santa Cruz Island. Historically only occasional visitors to the northern Channel Islands, golden eagles, which colonized the islands in the 1990s, are sustained by the abundance of feral pigs.

USFWS is establishing an Island Fox Integrated Recovery Implementation Team. This recovery team includes land managers, a recovery coordination group, and a technical analysis group. USFWS added the four subspecies of island fox to the federal endangered species list in March 2004.

This publication is available on line at: <http://www.nps.gov/chis/press060804.htm>